DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Sean Ingel DATE 1/26/82
RDS☐or XD:☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH.
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKING ☐
DECLASSIFIED☑ RELEASABLE☑
RELEASE DENIED☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

SECRET

MAY BE THAT HE HAS DOUBTS OF WINNING EVEN IF (SAY, UNDER US PRESSURE) THE ELECTION IS CONDUCTED WITH REASONABLE FAIRNESS. HE MUST REGARD WITH GREAT RESERVATION THE PROSPECT OF BEING BEATEN BY A MAN WHO IS HIS JUNIOR IN AGE AND MILITARY RANK. IT APPEARS THAT MANY OF HIS CLOSE FOLLOWERS, ESPECIALLY THE YOUNGER ELEMENT, ARE URGING HIM TO WITHDRAW FOR THESE REASONS. KY HAS MADE IT CLEAR PUBLICLY HE HOPES MINH WILL NOT RUN, NO DOUBT TO DEPRIVE THIEU OF A CREDIBLE REELECTION.

4. MINH CAN ASSUME THAT TO DATE OUR REPRESENTATIONS TO PRESIDENT THIEU ON THE ELECTION HAVE BEEN TO NO AVAIL. HE MAY DOUBT WE ARE WILLING TO INVOKE ADDITIONAL PERSUASION-- INCLUDING THE THREAT OF SANCTIONS--TO FORCE THIEU TO CHANGE HIS TACTICS. MINH SAYS HE FEELS A SENSE OF DUTY TO THE PEOPLE HE BELIEVES HAVE FAITH IN HIM, BUT HE HAS AS YET SHOWN NO REAL EVIDENCE OF BEING CONVINCED BY THE ARGUMENTS THAT (A) A PROPERLY CNTESTED ELECTION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IN VIET-NAM, OR THAT (B) EVEN IF HE FAILS TO WIN, BY RUNNING HE WILL GAIN MANY VOTES AND BE IN A POSITION TO LEAD A VIGOROUS OPPOSITION. HE APPEARS MORE WORRIED ABOUT HIS OWN REPUTATION THAN BY WHAT WILL HEPPEN TO VIET-NAM IF THE ELECTION FAILS TO COME OFF. MINH WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT, NOT THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITON.

5. ON THE OTHER HAND, CENTRAL TO ANY ASSESSMENT OF MINH'S INTENTIONS IS THE QUESTION OF HIS ELECTION TACTICS WHICH ARE NECESSARILY GROUNDED ON EFFORTS TO NEUTRALIZE THIEU'S ADVANTAGES AS THE INCUMBENT. MINH'S MAIN ASSET IS THIS PURSUIT IS THE UNITED STATES, AND HIS CONTINUING THREATS TO WITHDRAW CAN BE SEEN AS AN ATTEMPT TO ENERGIZE US TO ACT IN HIS BEHALF. HE PRESUMBLY SEES NO ONE ELSE AS HAVING A GREATER STAKE IN A CONTESTED ELECTION OR MORE INFLUENCE WIT THIEU, AND HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN MAXIMUM PRESSURE ON US AS LONG AS HE STAYS IN THE RACE.

6. IN ASSESSING THESE VARIOUS FACTORS WE CONCLUDE THAT MINH'S DECISON TO WITHDRAW WILL REFLCT MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE HIS ASSESSMENT OF HISCHANCES OF WINNING. THIS WILL DEPEND ON HIS ABILITY TONEUTRALIZE THIEU'S ADVANTAGES WHICH IN TURN HINGES ON US INTERCESSION WITH THE PRESIDENT. AT THE MOMENT WE BELIEVE THE CHANCES ARE BETTER THAN EVEN THAT MINH WILL SOONER OR LATER DECIDE TO WITHDRAW. THE CHANCES WILL INCREASE

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IF EVIDENCE CONTINUES TO MOUNT THAT THIEU AND HIS ADMINISTRATION ARE PERSISTING IN THEIR PRESENT ATTITUDE AND TACTICS. THE PRESSURES ON MINH TO RESIGN ARE PROBABLY NOW REACHING THEIR PEAK AS THE DAY -- AUGUST 24 -- APPROACHES FOR THE FINAL POSTING OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. THEREAFTER, MINH MIGHT FIND IT PROGRESSIVELY MORE DIFFICULT TO PULL OUT.

B. IF HE WITHDRAWS.

7. SHOULD MINH DECIDE TO WITHDRAW HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY CHARGE THIEU RESOUNDINGLY WITH ELECTION FRAUD, AND VARIOUS OPPOSITION ELEMENTS MIGHT FOLLOW HIS LEAD AND BOYCOTT THE ELECTION. THESE ELEMENTS MIGHT THEN SEEK TO RALLY AROUND MINH, IN ACTIVE OPPOSITION TO THIEU, BUT, IN OUR JUDGMENT, MINH WOULD TEND AGAIN TO RETIRE FROPUBLIC LIFE, GIVING WAY TO MORE EXTREMIST LEADSHIP, WITH KY A PROMINENT CANDIDATE FOR THE ROLE. DEPRIVED OF AN ACCEPTED LGAL FRAMEWORK, THE STRUGGLE COULD RAPIDLY PROVOKE THE USE OF FORCE PROBABLY IN THE FI ST INSTANCE BY THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE INTEREST OF

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PRS-01 INR-05 INRE-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 PM-03 DODE-00

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KEEPING PUBLIC ORDER. REPRESSIVE MEASURES, ALTHOUGH PHYSICALLY EFFECTIVE FOR A WHILE, WOULD PUT THE THIEU REGIME IN EVEN WORSE LIGHT AND UNDERMINE THE CREDIBILITY OF ANY SCHEME THIEU MIGHT DEVISE TO COPE WITH THE POLITICAL CRISIS. SINCE MUCH OF THIEU'S AUTHORITY HAS DEPENDED ON A BALANCING OF FORCES IN THE POWER STRUCTURE, RATHER THAN ON A LARGE AND COMMITTED PERSONAL FOLLOWING, IT IS VULNERABLE TO INTERNAL STRAINS. THE COMMUNISTS WOULD MOVE RAPIDLY TO TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION BY POLITICAL AS WELL AS MILITARY MEANS.

8. THE CONSEQUENCESMIGHT BE SOMEWHAT LESS DRASTIC IF MINH REMAINED UNTIL AFTER THE AUGUST 29 LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONS. IF THOSE ELECTIONS WERE REASONABLY WELL CONDUCTED, AN QUANG AND OTHER PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE GAINED A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF SEATS AND THEREBY A FURTHER STAKE IN THE SECOND REPUBLIC. THEY MIGHT THUS BE PERSUADED TO ACT MORE MODERATELY AND RESPONSIBLY IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CRISIS. AT LEAST THERE WOULD BE A FRESH AND RELATIVELY UNCONTAMINATED BODY OF POPULARLY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

9. A SUCCESSFUL LOWER HOUSE ELECTIONWOULD ALSO LESSEN THE FORCE OF ANY CHARGE OF FRAUD LY MINH AGAINST THIEU AND LEAVE THE PRESIDENT IN A SOMEWHAT STRONGER POSITION TO WORK OUT

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SOME SOLUTION. (FINALLY, MINH WOULD PERHAPS BE UNDER GREATER COMPLUSION NOT TO WITHDRAW IF HE HAD WITNESSED A REASONABLY FAIR LOWER-HOUSE ELECTION.)

10. WHATEVER THE MOMENT MINH SHOULD CHOSE TO WITHDRAW, IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 3 WOULD BE ANYTHING BUT A WASHOUT. HOWEVER THIEU SHOULD SEEK TO SALVAGE IT (AS IN THE FORM OF A YES-OR-NO POPULAR REFERENDUM ON HIMSELF AND HIS POLICIES), IT WOULD PROBABLY BE REGARDED AS A TRAVESTY OF WHAT IS PROMISED IN THE CONSTITUTION AND A CONSEQUENCELARGELY OF THIEU'S OWN DOING. GOING THROUGH WITH IT UNOPPOSED WOULD BE SEEN, CERTAINLY IN FOREIGN EYES AND PROBABLY ALSO IN VIETNAMESE OPINION, AS AN EXTRA-LEGAL AND DISCREDITED ATTEMPT TO HANG ON TO POWER. THIEU HAS NOT DEVELOPED THE POPULARITY TO OFFSET THE LOSS OF LEGAL AND MORAL AUTHORITY. HE PROBABLY COULD PULL IT OFF AND SURVIVE IN THE SHORT TERM, SINCE NO ONE ELSE AT PRESENT HAS COMPARABLE ACCESS TO THE LEVERS OF POWER--THE MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES AND THEPUBLIC ADMINISTRATION. BUT AS NOTED ABOVE THIEU'S HOLD ON THE LEVERS IS TENUOUS AND COULD BE WEAKENED PROGRESSIVELY BY THE STRESSES ARISING FROMILLEGITIMACY AND RESORT TO UNPOPULAR MEASURES.

11. THIEU MIGHT HAVE A BETTER CHANCE IF HE TOOK POLITICAL ACTION PROMPTLY AND MORE OR LESSWITHIN THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, FOR EXAMPLE BY CALLING OFF THE ELECTION AND CONVENING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO DEVISE NEW LEGISLATION FOR A NEW PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WHICH WOULD BE SCHEDULED WITH AS LITTLE DELAY AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, IT NOW APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT THIEU WOULD TAKE ANY SUCH ACTION ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE. AGAIN CHANCES FOR REASONABLE STABILITY IN THE INTERIM WOULD BE ENHANCED BY A SUCCESSFUL LOWER HOUSE ELECTION.

12. IN THE EVENT OF MINH'S WITHDRAWAL, EXTRAORDINARY POLITICAL MEASURES APPLIED PROMPTLY AND WITH WISDOM MIGHT SUSTAIN THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM. IN THEIR ABSENCE THE LIKELY OUTCOME WOULD BE A DRASTIC DECLINE IN POLITICAL STABILITY.
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